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ABSTRACT

To provide parents with a clearer picture of what does or what can go on in the classroom when innovative materials and ideas are used, a demonstration program was presented for them by the local university and student teachers. Student teachers briefly introduced the purpose of the demonstration and materials used, had the elementary students work with the materials, and responded to questions from the parents and cooperating teachers regarding what they had observed. Throughout the university participation with the program was stressed. (JD)

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PARENTS AND TEACHERS MEET "EDUCATIONAL INNOVATIONS" AT THE LOCAL SCHOOL LEVEL

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Through a cooperative program between the education department of Auburn University at Montgomery and the public schools, local PTA's in Montgomery, Alabama, have become increasingly aware of the most recent materials and methods of teaching in the elementary school.

The Parent Teacher Associations' in the Montgomery school system are eager to do as much as possible to bring to their schools what is new and innovative. Yearly fund-raising projects in the past have gone toward improving the learning environment for students and teachers. Parents and teachers alike saw a need for and displayed an interest in learning about innovations that could help to improve the instructional program.

Auburn University at Montgomery is continually working to keep abreast of and supplied with the latest teaching aids for the benefit of their students. The University sees its role as not only producing qualified graduates in the particular disciplines but also serving the community through its faculty and facilities.

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Each of these resources were involved in a community awareness program. AUM student teachers were placed in Dannelly Elementary School as part of their normal course responsibility. In addition to their classroom responsibilities, they brought with them to the schools some of the latest materials being used in the elementary field and incorporated them into their training program with the elementary school children. The participating elementary school supervising teachers wanted other teachers in the school as well as parents to see these materials in use. They felt the school might be able to incorporate these or similar curriculum aides into the instructional program if the parents understood and supported the ideas.

An evening information program was desigred to allow freedom of movement throughout the school building where demonstrations were going on. In several locations, student teachers worked with elementary students in demonstrating new materials and methods.

Parents and teachers arrived at school prior to 7:00 p.m. and were given a program indicating new teaching aids which were being demonstrated and in what rooms. (Materials and methods in language arts, science, social studies, and mathematics were presented.) Parents and teachers were able to observe each demonstration for 15 minutes. In that time, the AUM student was able

to briefly introduce the purpose of the demonstration and materials used, have the elementary students actually work with the materials, and respond to questions from the parents regarding what they had observed.

At 8:00 p.m. parents and faculty convened in the school auditorium where the overall purpose of the program was briefly explained. A key point made in this large group meeting and in the individual classroom demonstrations was that no one was trying to sell any company's product, but that we only wanted an aware PTA to know what was available.

The final phase of the program again stressed University participation with the involvement of the elementary students. A brief presentation of new activities in physical education was presented with first through sixth grade students performing dances, stunts, and games. (Physical education teachers are not yet available in the elementary school of Montgomery, and classroom teachers are eager to see what is new and if it can be incorporated into their particular program needs.) To help us evaluate the program with the group, the parents were asked for their comments. Brief interviews were held with parents following the programs to gather their reactions to a number of questions that evolved from the program.

Parents interviewed were highly positive in their judgments. One mother felt the new teaching materials would help children look

forward to school more. Some parents were amazed at what their children could accomplish. One mother in responding to what she saw when observing the Cuisenaire Rods stated, "I like them but I couldn't understand them."

Both parents and teachers noted positively the contributions of the University students to the total effort. One father of few words may have summed up the general reaction when he commented the University involvement was "very much appreciated."

In relating his judgmert of the total program effort and its impact, a father stated, "This is more sensible learning than we ever had. Learning isn't as complicated as we had it, and the children get more out of it."

During the following academic year several more programs of a similar nature were carried out for elementary schools of Montgomery. Each was different because the very nature of the program kept it from becoming static. The University student personnel changed each quarter as did the students and teachers in the participating schools. What was presented was also different because the University could not stand pat with what it had originally offered without exploring the most current educational materials. There was a student-faculty understanding that the University must be willing to experiment and reevaluate as part of its normal operational plan.

A number of objectives are being met by such university and public school cooperation. A significant result of a program of this nature is that it offers parents a clearer picture of either what does or what can go on in the classroom when the latest in teaching materials are used in conjunction with sound educational practices. Here parents, University students, college faculty members, as well as public school teachers must make value judgments based on what they have observed.

The program cited stressed the University involvement with the local school. It is possible and reasonable to expect the school administration and faculty to present such a program concept to the parents. After all, an informed parent population can do much in making future educational advances possible.